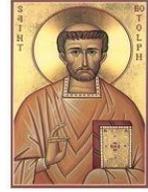




The Botolphian

Newsletter of
The Society of Saint Botolph

www.botolph.info



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Highlights this month

- The lost church of St Botolph, Sulby, Northamptonshire.
- It gives me great pleasure to welcome as a new member, Revd Jonathan Collis, the new rector of Saint Botolph's Cambridge.

Editorial

Further thoughts on Saint Christopher – the usurper of St Botolph's position as Patron Saint of Travellers:

In the last issue I did my best to pin the date of Saint Christopher's taking over Saint Botolph's responsibilities, to late C15. This you will remember was when the printed version of Jacob de Voragine's book the **Golden Legend** first became *readily* available to the general public due to Caxton's good work with his printing presses. I also used this as my basis for suggesting that the magnificent wall painting of Saint Christopher at Saint Botolph's Church in Slapton must surely date from late C15.

In the past month I have been researching paintings of Saint Christopher still further and there is no doubt that some exist which, like the Golden Legend's first publication in manuscript form in 1275, can be dated back to as early as C13. Clive Rouse, in his book *Medieval Wall Paintings*¹ tells us that the mural of St Christopher in the church of Little Hampden in Buckinghamshire is reputedly the earliest known painting of the saint in England – although Rouse does not offer an actual date. I also discovered that the earliest known reference to him was in 1240 when Henry III (reigned 1218-1272) ordered that 'an image of St Christopher holding and carrying Jesus is to be made and painted where it may best and suitably be placed'. This

¹ E. Clive Rouse, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, 4th edn (Princes Risborough: Shire Publications Ltd, 1991). ISBN 0 7478 0144 4.

was sited in the Chapel of Saint Peter ad Vincula in the Tower of London. For that to be the first actual reference we must assume that the idea had been around for some time previously – making early C13 a more accurate date for the mythological saint's takeover. Interestingly this period is close to the date of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 from which all sorts of novel ecclesiastical ideas seem to have sprung.

The Annual (!) Luncheon of the Society of Saint Botolph will be held in Cambridge on **Wednesday 18th October 2023 at 1230 for 1 p.m.** The venue has yet to be arranged but I hope that one of the colleges might be able to accommodate us. Please join us.

Feature

Sulby, Northamptonshire.

Approach (i) for the site (best guess) of St Botolph's Church: *From the Misterton Interchange at Junction 20 on the M1 take the third exit onto the A4304 Lutterworth Road to the east and 4.9 miles later at North Kilworth Wharf turn right on Station Road and head southeast for 1.1 miles to the junction with the A5199 Welford Road. Turn right here and after 1.3 miles turn left along Naseby Road. After 0.2 miles you will find the access to the Jurassic Way footpath on your left. Leave your vehicle in the parking area and walk north east for 500 yards. Cross the reservoir and continue to the northeast for a further 400 yards, and the site of the church will be 100 yards to the east of you.*

(ii) For the earlier site of Selby Abbey: *Return to your vehicle and then drive east along Naseby Road for nearly a mile, whereupon on your right at a widening of the road you will find a marked footpath which seems to lead close to the ancient site.*

Locations:

Ancient site of St Botolph's Church Sulby (best guess): 52.428, -1.0372; NN6 6EZ.

Site of access to the Jurassic Way:

52.422, -1.049; NN6 6HZ.

Ancient site of Sulby Abbey:

52.415, -1.034; NN6 6JA.

Visiting this site is, of course, only for the staunchest of Botolphian Researchers since there is nothing to see. I write this not yet having visited the site myself ... but I *shall* do so since over the years I have discovered that actually *being there* is the only way to properly get to grips with the 'vibes' of a place. Viewing the general lie of the land directly sometimes elucidates a piece of logic which would otherwise have escaped notice. It is a long shot admittedly, but I shall still make the trip.

When Graham Ward first brought this new site to my attention I was delighted, but only half surprised since I believe there must be at least twenty or more similar Botolph sites just waiting to be found.

Researchers have been compiling lists of *Botolph Churches* for many years – one of the early notables being Frances Arnold-Forster who, in 1899,² listed 61 St Botolph Churches.

In 1924 F.S. Stevenson³ pronounced that there were over 70.

Today I have a list of 78 churches which are recorded as having been dedicated to Saint Botolph. I also have a supplemental list bearing a further 14 locations where our saint's name has historically recorded connections. These lists cover the United Kingdom but another list covering Scandinavia produces a further 14 dedications.

Of the 78 definitive UK dedications 65 of the churches are still physically traceable (i.e. either the whole church or some ruins exist) and of those, 59 still offer regular Anglican worship under the Saint Botolph umbrella.

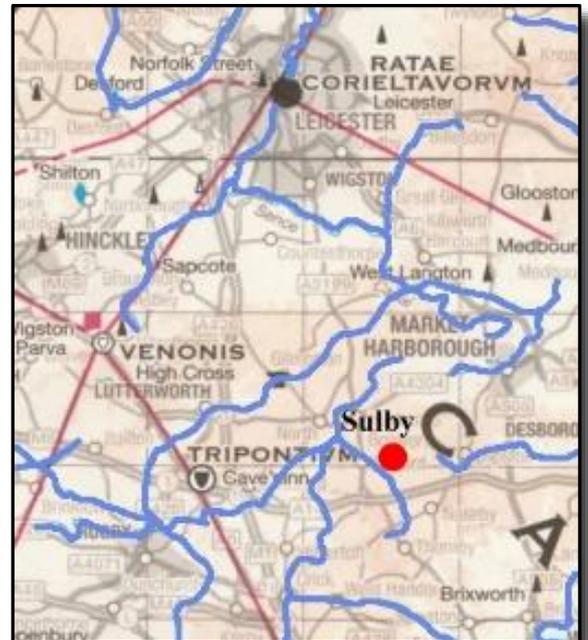
Churches dedicated to Saint Botolph are notable for having ancient roots and have generally displayed great longevity so, sad as it might be in some ways, a 'shrinkage' of 25% (as Marks and Spencers euphemistically used to call it when items were lost to shoplifters - I was privileged to work for this firm for a while) is probably not too bad considering the number of centuries involved.

² *Arnold-Forster, Frances. 1899. Studies in Church Dedications, or England's Patron Saints.* London: Skeffington & Son, 1899.

³ *St Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken. Stevenson, F.S. 1924, s.l.: Proceedings of SIAH (Suffolk Archaeology & History), Vol. XVIII.*



As we see from the map above, Sulby lies just south of Leicester; it is 75 miles northwest of London and not far from the M1 motorway. My first question about this new site was "Why there? This surely cannot turn out to be a *Travellers' Church* when the site is so far away from Roman roads (see map below) which one always thinks of as indicating the general arterial connections through the country?"



On first sight there being a St Botolph's church in the village of Sulby did not seem to make sense – particularly as it had only just come to light after years of people making lists of these churches and constantly (apparently) missing this one.

Nevertheless, as I investigated further it became clear that this is exactly what had happened. It

had been noted several times but never actually made it to the list.

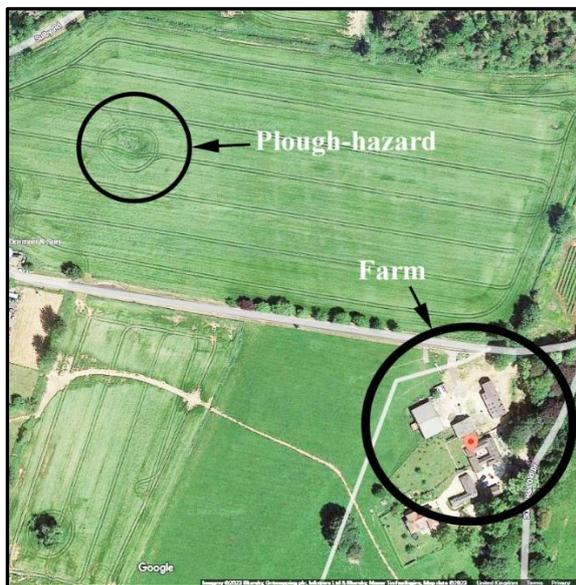
The first major confirmation of the church's existence came from my regular source: British History Online⁴ where we read:

'There was apparently a parish church at Sulby, separate from that of Sulby Abbey and dedicated to St. Botolph. Bridges (op. cit., 597⁵) said that the nave had fallen down long before 1451 and the rest of the building was destroyed at the Dissolution. It was said to have stood about a mile N. of the abbey near the N.W. end of the meadow called St. Botolph's Pool.'

The same reference reveals the existence of evidence of a 'lost medieval village' in the area:

'The deserted village of Sulby, lies near the W. edge of the parish, W. of Park Farm, on land sloping S.E. to a small tributary of the R. Avon on Boulder Clay between 137 m. and 155 m. above OD. The earthworks are in very good condition and are especially interesting because they show that the greater part of the village was ploughed over after its desertion.'

A Google Satellite picture showed nothing particular one mile to the north of Sulby Abbey but a little further on, a very evident 'plough-hazard' was showing up.



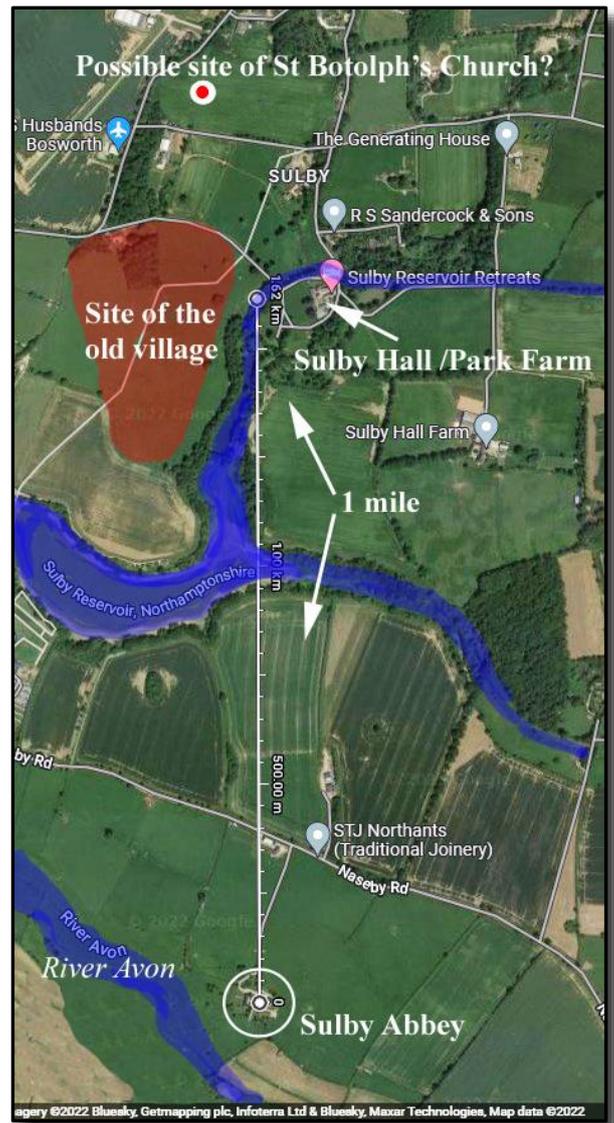
I wondered if this was a tree – or perhaps masonry left from the ruins of an old church?

⁴ 'Sulby', in *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northamptonshire, Volume 3, Archaeological Sites in North-West Northamptonshire* (London, 1981), pp. 182-187. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rchme/northants/vol3/pp182-187> [accessed 22 December 2022].

⁵ Bridges (*Hist. of Northants.*, I (1791)

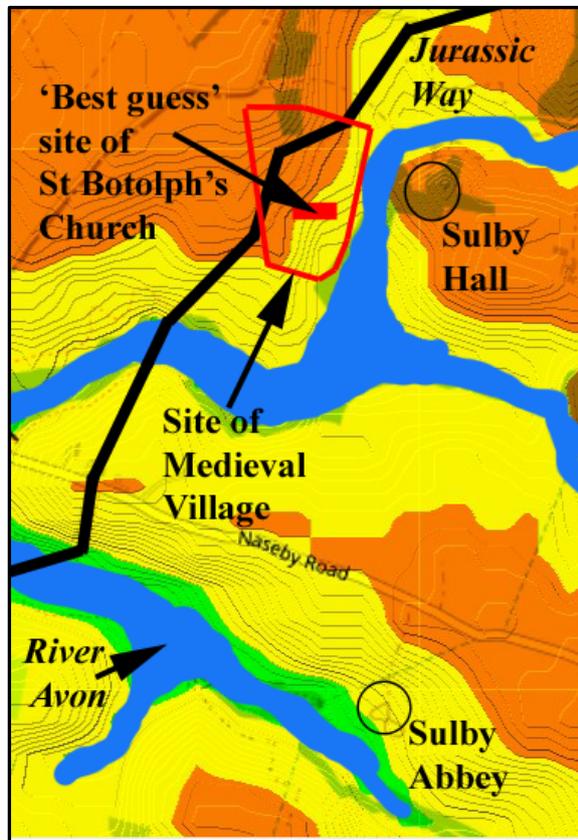
I took a gamble, telephoned Sandercocks Farm (aka Park Farm aka (originally) Sulby Hall) and spoke to Mrs. Sandercock explaining that I was the administrator of the Society of Saint Botolph and saying that I was researching the possibility of their being the remains of a Saint Botolph's Church in their village.

"Oh yes," came the reply (which stopped me in my tracks), "it's just across the field from us!" She passed the telephone over to her husband Ian Sandercocks who was very helpful and told me I was entirely wrong about my 'plough hazard' and gently explained just where the church was.



I composed the map above at an early stage in my research and the area marked *Possible site of St Botolph's Church* can now be ignored.

It was British History Online that had thrown me partially off the scent by its comment that Sulby's parish church is said to have stood about a mile north of Sulby Abbey so I used the abbey as my marker. The 'plough hazard' I found, was slightly further north of BHO's directions, whereas the now commonly accepted site, is a little further south.



I made a second attempt and after looking at the topographical layout of the area and inking in the wider waterways that would have existed in medieval times, I found that I was left with the above.

The abbey was my next consideration though, like the church, there is nothing to be seen of it today.

In 1155 a Premonstratensian institution was founded in the adjacent parish of Welford by William de Wideville, the lord of that manor. Later, after he added Sulby manor and church to his estate, the abbey was moved to Sulby where it lay close to the River Avon. It seems to have been quite prestigious because Edward II stayed there several times. It was dissolved at the Reformation and purchased by a succession of lay owners so it looks as if the abbey buildings and the church might have survived in Protestant form. The remains of some stonework were still evident as late as 1791.

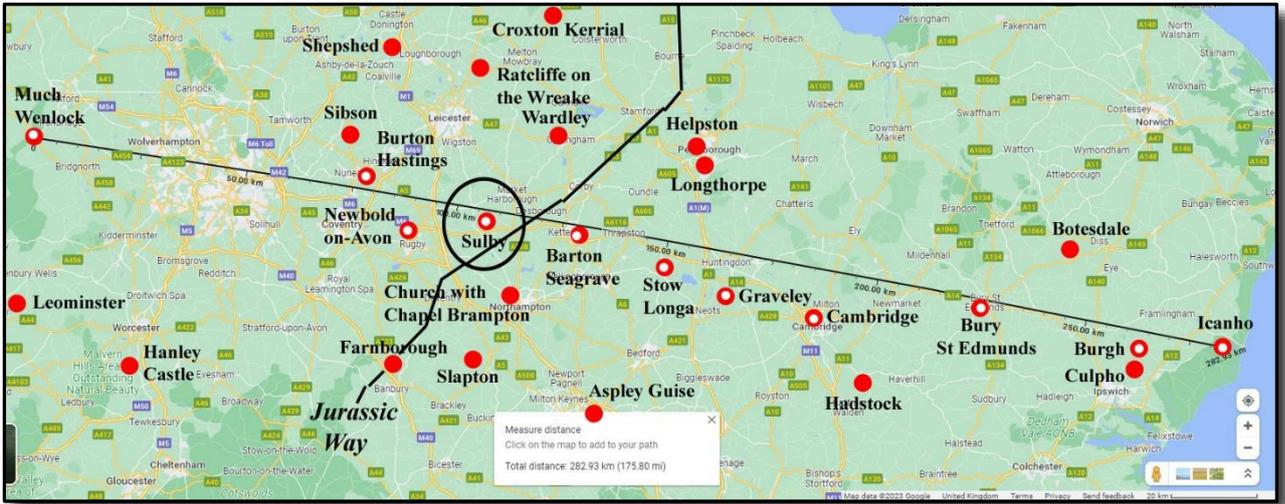
John Speed's map (below) of c.1611 shows a church at Sulby. Could this be the now-buried one in its heyday? This seems unlikely because

records tell us that the nave had fallen down long before 1451 (the village itself had been abandoned by 1428) and the rest of the church was destroyed within the next eighty years.



The map shows it lying close to the river and this suggests that it was more likely to have been the *abbey* church mentioned above. When my attention was first drawn to Sulby I was worried that the church did not seem to be following the usual St Botolph Church characteristics and I was therefore sceptical that I might be on a wild goose chase. With the lack of nearby Roman roads I could not see much scope for a good supply of wayfarers. Suddenly however famine turned to feast when not only were there plenty of waterways with travel potential, but part of the 88 miles of Jurassic Way were cutting through this part of the countryside. It ran from Banbury in Oxfordshire to Stamford in Lincolnshire and is commemorated today as a route for ramblers but was originally an ancient trackway which followed the limestone ridge. This would have brought plenty of travellers right past the church's door.

Another Botolphian factor which might have been responsible for the creation of first church on this site was that of Saint Botolph's connection with Much Wenlock Abbey in Shropshire (see *Botolphian* issue 75 of 1st August 2019). During the latter part of his lifetime our saint would have made several journeys to this abbey and although his route must have varied, the map below shows it as the crow might have flown between Iken in Suffolk (the putative site of Icanho Abbey) and Much Wenlock. I have added in the Jurassic Way and where the two lines cross – Lo and Behold – we find Sulby church. Whether or not Botolph churches cluster around the tracks of the Jurassic Way and the Much Wenlock trail (the latter churches illustrated by the white dots), or whether these tracks just happen to pass through the aggregation of churches dedicated to Saint Botolph we will have to leave to conjecture.



Iken to Much Wenlock as the crow flies, the Jurassic Way and Sulby.

Travellers along the ancient trackway would not have followed an identical path each time of course – far less so probably than today’s rambles. So churches which might appear to be rather far from the track would still have been serviced by it. To some extent, although the old path might have influenced the building of the church, once these churches were built, the situation would often have been reversed so that it became the churches attracting the travellers.

On a cold wet day, knowing that shelter from a church was available just a few miles ahead would be enough to drive the wayfarer’s feet in that direction. Even in the seventh century, churches, in spite of being wooden, were comparatively permanent items and churches which fostered a cult like that of Saint Botolph would be even more so. The stability came not only from the building but from the people who ran it and the tenets they professed. Botolphians then were not just names on a newsletter, they were real people whose ethos was catering both spiritually and physically for the needs of travellers.

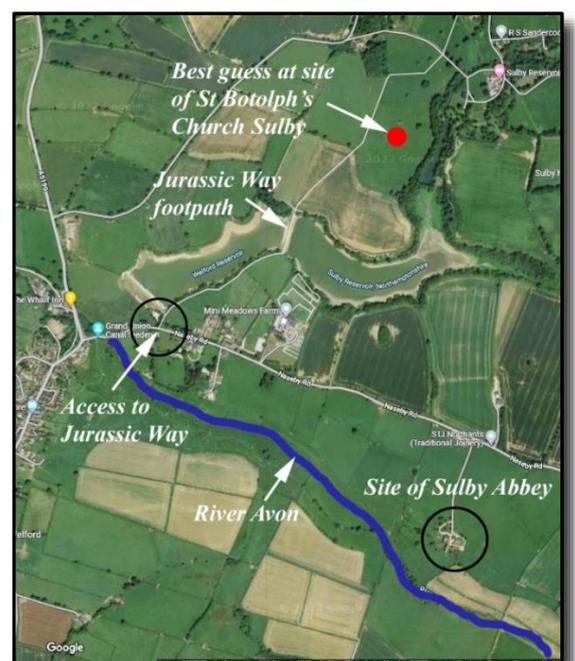
And who were these travellers? Again this has been discussed in previous issues, but they would range from sheep drovers to merchants, from journeymen to kings. Any one of these would be pleased to have a rescue station close at hand and any one might be delighted to find somewhere to rest their head for the night ... and inclined to leave a grateful votive offering before their departure the next morning.

Below, courtesy of Matt Nicholas and Historic England, is a picture of the site showing the undulations that are still evident – especially from the air. Encircled is the ‘best guess site’ where St Botolph’s Church, Sulby is deemed to have stood. I have cropped the image and added

a black line to indicate the path of the rambles’ Jurassic Way as it passes through the fields.



This is a truly exceptional site and I am looking forward to visiting it.



If you also decide to do so, and you are going by car you will need to drive to the south of the village and leave your car in the car park at the access point at Latitude 52.422, and Longitude -1.049; Postcode NN6 6HZ as shown at the beginning of this article. Your route will take you across the reservoir as marked above.



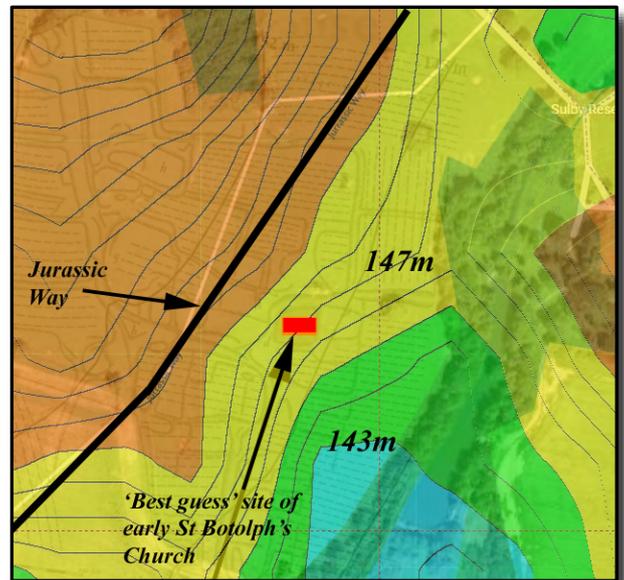
This sketch outlines the groundplan⁶ of the ‘lost’ village. Highlighted in red is a piece of raised ground which it is thought marks the location of the old Saint Botolph’s Church. It is nicely aligned West-East. N.B. The black lines are not pathways but contour lines.

BHO tells us that the nave of the church had fallen down long before 1451 and that the rest of the building was destroyed at the Dissolution. The village itself disappeared between 1377 and 1428 and was replaced by scattered farmsteads. By 1428 there were less than ten householders in the village. By 1547 2000 sheep were being grazed in the location which had large areas of pastureland well before that date.

This record of their being such a large number of sheep here in the Middle Ages once again reinforces the fact that this is typical Botolph country. What would have been the destiny of these sheep? Certainly between 1150 and 1450, if their fleece was of good quality, their drovers

⁶ Again taken from the Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northamptonshire, Volume 3 as noted earlier.

would have taken a selection up the Jurassic way to what was then known as Botolph’s Town (Boston in Lincolnshire) where they would have been shorn and their (best in the world) fleece marketed to be bought by shippers trading from Scandinavia who would carry not only the fleeces but the **name of Saint Botolph** to Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Gotland, Finland and Germany amongst others.



Here we see a contour map showing the church orientated in the traditional West-East manner and placed in the same position as that raised flat area shown in the other maps we saw earlier. The building is on an escarpment and 4 metres above the nearest water. The top of the slope lies 11 metres above it, giving it protection from the prevailing west or southwest winds. All (as listed in our Regular End-notes) typical characteristics of early Saint Botolph Churches.

Finally, and rather belatedly, I looked up the invaluable TASC database (Transnational database and Atlas of Saints Cults) – devised at Oxford by our old friend Graham Jones and found that Sulby had been there all the time, just patiently waiting to get noticed. How *could* I have missed it? The entry is shown below.

I have subsequently spent some time going through the database again and have found a few leads on other potential Botolph Churches, but whether the leads will prove fruitful or not remains to be seen. Watch this space.

Northampton	Rothwell	Stotfalde	Sibbertoft	Sibbertoft ab	chapel	Mary Blessed	1499
Northampton	Rothwell	Stotfalde	Sibbertoft	Sibbertoft b	fair	Holy Cross Inve	1300
Northampton	Rothwell	Stotfalde	Sulby, Old	Sulby, Old a	Chapel (Free)	Botolph	1500c
Northampton	Rothwell	Stotfalde	Sulby, Old	Sulby, Old b	abbey	Mary	1155

Classification

After a shaky start Sulby has proved to tick so many Botolphian boxes, albeit in an enigmatic way. There seems a chance (on the basis that it is on the route to Much Wenlock) that the site *could* have been founded in Botolph's lifetime in the seventh century. i.e.:

Type 1: *A church on a site which might have been founded directly by St Botolph during his life or by his acolytes soon after his death.*

Its presence *might* be related to the area being good grazing land for sheep. i.e.:

Type 4: *A church which, even if it had a humble predecessor on the same site, mainly blossomed as a result of opulence gained from the wool trade (c. 1150-1450).*

It certainly shows every sign of being a 'Travellers' church'. i.e.:

Type 5: *A church lying on or close to one of the major ancient trackways, rivers, Roman roads or city gates, the proximity of which merits the suspicion that a major aspect of the function of the church has for a long while been closely linked with long-distance travel.*

It seems to have been (as stated in TASC above) a 'free chapel' i.e. not subject to a monastery or parish church although *was* it perhaps the parish church itself? The parish map elicits no clues other than drawing attention to the fact that the site lies on the border of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire – adding another rosette.

* *A star is added to the 'Type' when the church lies on a county border.*

My conclusion is that the sheep were incidental, to the church's main function which I feel sure was **Type 5***. I would not be at all surprised if, perhaps in years to come, an archaeological dig were to uncover signs of post holes indicating that the old church was built on the site of a previous seventh century wooden church.

The next issue of *The Botolphian* is scheduled for 1st April 2023 ... two months' time.

REGULAR END-NOTES

If this is your first *Botolphian* and you have acquired it by circuitous means but would like to receive an email copy each month then just send an email to dp@botolph.info saying 'YES PLEASE.' If you wish to UNsubscribe then send the message 'NO THANKS.'

If you wish to purchase any of the books of the Botolph Trilogy please use the same email address.

You will frequently see the 'twin' towns of *Boston* mentioned in these newsletters, - one in Lincolnshire and the other in Massachusetts USA. The relevance to the Society is that the name 'Boston' is said to be a contraction of '*Botolph's Town*.'

Types of Botolph Church sites: -

The list of classifications I use has been subject to constant revision over the past ten years. The current version, first revised in December 2020, is as follows:

1. A church on a site which might have been founded directly by St Botolph during his life or by his acolytes soon after his death.
2. A church the original of which is thought to have been the product of Danish landowners (c.878-890, c.1016-1035).
3. A church originating from and as a result of Monastic Revival (c. 950 - 1016).
4. A church which, even if it had a humble predecessor on the same site, mainly blossomed as a result of opulence gained from the wool trade (c. 1150-1450).
5. A church lying on or close to one of the major ancient trackways, rivers, Roman roads or city gates, the proximity of which merits the suspicion that a major aspect of the function of the church has for a long while been closely linked with long-distance travel.
6. A church lying on or close to a pilgrimage route. For the moment until a pattern becomes clear, this classification has been sub-divided in the following way:
 - a. Churches founded for this purpose before A.D. 800.
 - b. Churches similarly founded but between the years A.D. 800 to 1066.
 - c. Churches founded after the Norman conquest.

* A star is added to the 'Type' when the church lies on a county border.

Typical Characteristics of early St Botolph Churches.

1. Nearly all are in the eastern half of England
2. Many lie on what today are county borders.
3. Most have Saxon foundations.
4. Many lie within 3 miles of a Roman road or well-used waterway.
5. Most are situated close to the bottom of an escarpment but well clear of water levels.
6. Many are strategically placed in areas which represent the beginnings, middles and ends of long journeys.

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